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NARRATOR Peggy Gardner

INTERVIEWER Phyllis Lotz

PLACE Gardner Ranch, Buellton

DATE Sept. 28, 1983

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Interview with Peggi Gardner

Date of Interview: September 28, 1983, Gardner Ranch, Buellton

Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz

Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Introduction

Tell me what brought you to the Santa Ynez Valley?

Mrs. G: I was living in Beverly Hills and had married a westerner, he was a cowboy. His mother had come from Texas to Arizona with nine kids, driving a covered wagon and team with her husband on horseback taking care of the stock, so he was from real westerners.

Living in Beverly Hills was not exactly his cup of tea, so we began to look for ranches and we looked for three years, looked extensively but we kept coming back to the Santa Ynez Valley because of the climate, the beauty, and because we were close friends of Channing Peake and his wife as we had visited them often. So this is where we finally decided we wanted to be and it took us three years to find the right place.

PL: You chose the western edge of the valley instead of another spot?

Mrs. G: We did look at Happy Canyon and we had even made a bid on a couple of other ranches but people would change their minds at the last moment. My husband being a cattle man knew we would need water and we had several reasons why we turned down other places. We decided this place had everything. It was owned at that time by Evans Pilsbury

and it was accessible for my daughter for school and other things.

PL: Were there buildings on the property?

Mrs. G: The buildings were all here. We improved the stables but otherwise all the buildings were here. We had looked at several places that were shown to us but the houses were too fancy. We looked at a ranch on San Marcos Pass, that house was very elaborate and I said who is going to...there was one room all windows, and I asked who is going to do all the windows, and all those mirrors!

PL: What year was this?

Mrs. G: We began looking in the 1940's and you know, I don't actually know if we moved here in 1947 or 48.

PL: Your daughter was how old?

Mrs. G: She was 12 and she went to the Buellton School, she had come ahead of us because she had to be in school as the term began. So she started with the Rolands in Buellton and then my husband came ahead because he had to find out where the wells were and the pumps so he had a session with Mr. Ruby, Mr. Pilsbury's foreman. I came on the date when we had occupancy driving up from Beverly Hills with my little Slick (son) standing beside me at two years old. The first thing when I drove in, I looked down and here was Johnnie building a race track. With all the other things he had to do, he had decided to build a track. I also saw down below a gentleman in a limousine with a chauffeur and it turned out to be Mr. Bixby, Elizabeth

Janeway's father. He had apparently come to see what was going on around here. So I just got a wave of a hand as I came up the road that first day. That was my introduction and of course later when the track was finished, it was a good bit later because my husband was busy with farming and planting, but we did have a match race between Sig Hansen and Johnnie and it was supposed to be just between us but when we went down to the track there were all these people and I didn't know many people in those days. And also later when we had the quarter horse races that was probably a good ten or more years later, we had people from the fair grounds, the jockeys and horses from the fair circuit. We got quite a good crowd and had concessions and Slim Pickens was once our announcer. Sometimes people would bring their own lunches in their station wagons but usually they would buy something to eat here. It was a lot of fun.

PL: So you settled in, and did you change much around?

Mrs. G: No, not in the home area. Mrs. Pilsbury had more oriental things and when we first looked at the house Johnnie said this doesn't look to ranchy but I told him not to worry about it. That stone fireplace was put in by a group of hunters, because before the Pilsburys, this was a hunting lodge. This was all one room but Mrs. Pilsbury added on. There were a lot of closets here, everything was here. We bought all the equipment, tractors, etc, so we started out pretty well here. When we first came here there was a

wonderful relationship between the ranchers and the merchants. That was what the merchants depended on really for their income because they were not many tourists then. Also the type of goods they were carrying was mostly for ranchers and the first Christmas we were here, Nielsen-Rasmussen, they were still together, came to see us, every clerk, and they came and brought us a gift. It was a very nice feeling, that type of greeting.

PL: You did your shopping in Solvang?

Mrs. G: Well, there were a few things in Buellton but very few.

We were buying parts and most of the parts we had to go to Santa Maria for, but there was one, (shop) I can't remember his name, but one old man in Solvang kept things that you hadn't seen for 15 to 20 years. Lila Maxwell had the one gift shop in town. It had Royal Copenhagen and it had very attractive things and she was the main gift shop.

PL: Her shop was on Copenhagen Drive?

Mrs. G: Yes, and Solvang had the charm of a Swiss village as it was surrounded by mountains, and the building were kept low.

PL: Who were some of the other ranchers around?

Mrs. G: The Peakes were here, Jack Mitchell was still here, the Crawfords, Dabneys of course. We had been shown pictures of that ranch and there again the house was so big and elaborate that we did not consider it. That is where the Jouglin Ranch is now (Hwy. 154 and Refugio). The Dabney has been cut up now but that whole area had belonged to

Dabney. We had been shown pictures of that place but the real estate man did not know what he was doing because he was showing us movies of cattle being fed, and my husband said, well I don't know about that! The thing was that the cattle were being fed instead of feeding off the land. There was a shortage of water in some areas of that ranch.

PL: Of course all this area has trouble getting enough water?

Mrs. G: Yes, I remember the very first rain we had after coming here, they had been having a drought for 7 years, and the first winter rain, the farmers in town were all out under the porte de chere (in front of Nielsen-Rasmussen Store) grinning at each other, here was rain and that meant money to them of course. We also had the first snow that winter. The ground was completely covered with snow. One thing about Danish Days in those days, every body met in town, you really went to Danish Days, now the Danes avoid it. There were a few tourists but they had tables in the center (of the street) and you met your friends, people helping with everything and it had a tremendous spirit. It was for valley people. Ray Passke was responsible for the new wood architecture, that building he put up at the head of Copenhagen Dr. at Alisal, it was done very well. At the end, at the south was a little bungalow and he had his office there. Then slowly every body started changing. He did really start off the Danish Architecture. He had gone to high school here and every one was very proud of him. He was successful.

PL: Who were some of the other merchants?

Mrs. G: Leonard Parsons, who had the drug store, his sons have it now. Andy Iversen was there for a long time. The Bruns, and the Hansens. I like the Danes very much, they can stand on their own feet. I miss them a great deal as they began to phase out, you noticed a lot of difference in town. They had a lot of drive.

PL: What about Axel Nielsen?

Mrs. G: Axel was our leader. He had no problems with people at all, they accepted him and he was very responsible for Danish Days. He was a town mayor, he really was, but he did not push it, he led. He was willing to give the time himself.

PL: Was he agreeable to the town becoming more tourist oriented?

Mrs. G: I think we all were at that time, I don't think that we foresaw how tremendously it has taken over and it does bother us, but after all the town has to be something. The main thing I think that most of us worry about is that it might grow too much. What they say now, when we object to it growing too fast is, "but you came in, now you want to slam the door behind you?" But you have to consider that if you have a hot tub for 6 people and don't invite 30 to 40 people over, do you? Nowadays everything is over done. In the sixties there was movement to over develop everything. Real estate was something every one went in to, it was easy to get into,

the exams were not that difficult. We had too many real estate people here, so it began to be a battle and I think the industry has over done itself. They have become so big they have taken over other companies. We are in a little bowl here and the air quality should be protected. From the tests that have been made, they show that there is poor circulation of air in this valley. I have worked on the Advisory Committee and Comprehensive Plan and we had to protect the valley. We had ranchers like Allie Chamberlain, contractors, and even a developer on that committee. We had quite a balanced committee.

PL: It is their home too.

Mrs. G: Thats right, we found that people were only interested in their immediate area. They did not seem to thing about others, taken of course if you hadn't seen the charm of this place as in the early days of the 40's and 50's you could not compare.

One thing that was nice about the valley was the equality here.

Everyone absolutely on the same level whether it was the wealthier rancher to the butcher, baker and candlestick maker. We had a wedding here when my daughter was married and had 800 people from every walk of life. People from the Mother's Club helped serve. This made it a lovely event, because no one was left out. That type of thing is very hard to find, when you have it you should not loose it. It seems as though you have to keep fighting, even

when you think things are under control. There are a majority of people who came here for the same reasons that I came but there are others who come to make the most of every thing. They are not making progress, they are going backward. You know, the one thing that people don't seem to think about and I think about it a lot; the oil in Santa Barbara. To have fresh air, go swimming, beauty, a beatter quality of life. Not to have better cars, more possessions. It is not just for the few, it is for everybody.

PL: When you for came to Buellton, did you do only ranching?

Mrs. G: We had dry crops for quite awhile and we farmed. When we first came everything was exciting to us, I have pictures of Slick when he was a little thing watching Johnnie with a seeder or plow, , everything that went on in the fields was part of our lives. Johnnie worked like a son of a gun, getting up at 5 in the morning and he was pretty darn tired by 6 at night, because he was doing most of the work himself, with one man extra. Now we have more help. We had quarter horses first, then thoroughbreds. Incidentally, the first thoroughbreds were at the Alisal Ranch, this was before it became a guest ranch. Charlie Perkins had it then and Flying Ebony, who had won the Kentucky Derby was there, and he is buried there. There was another horse called Lou Dillon, a world famous trotter there also. I don't know who owned Lou Dillon. I think they were for stud but not on the scale of today.

When I was still living in Beverly Hills my oldest son as a youngster went to work at the Alisal when they were first building, when Jackson first took over and they were putting up new buildings. Then when we moved here the Alisal Guest Ranch was in operation. I think it has caused a lot of the prestige here, it has kept it's high quality.

End of Side 1, Tape 1

Begin Side 2, Tape 1

I was on the Advisory Committee for seven years and the committee resisted that because they felt it would increase the traffic and make it impossible on Alisal Rd., (Mrs. Gardner is talking about the Sheraton Inn) without widening it and it would take away from the atmosphere and it was going to affect the town itself. So they had a lot of resistance partly because they were planning on too large a development.

PL: We have found here that if a developer can wait it out, he usually does get what he wants.

Mrs. G: Unfortunately that is true, good or bad. I was absolutely crushed over the Sheraton Convention Center. I don't think that is the place for it. Mini or not, it is going to affect traffic along Alisal Road and into Solvang.

The views on San Marcos Pass are so beautiful with the three ranges of mountains in the background. The tourists are here over night so views are not as important to them but we live here.

PL: Did you know Fletcher Jones at all?

Mrs. G: No, I knew him to speak to but not very well. Yes, he was one of the first to start a large horse industry here, and that wasa with the help of Jack Dempsey. Jack Dempsey has a ranch here on Buell Flat. He was at Cardiff Stud quite awhile. He is a very fine Irish horseman and probably one of the best horeman in the valley. At one time he was with Mrs. Jackson. She had a ranch right along the river and those horses were washed out in the flood of 1969. In fact one of them landed here on my ranch. That was a terrible flood.

PL: Tell me what happened?

Mrs. G: We lost 250 acres that washed down to Lompoc, it was inexcusable. They should have opened the dam. They said Santa Barbara has paided for this water and its like money in the bank, but it was ridiculous, cost the valley 5 million dollars. Jackson must have lost about a million, Hasken lost half a million. One man in Lompoc lost his whole ranch. We never had flood control, the Corps of Engineers told you, "you voted against it," so I investigated it because I thought it might have occurred before I got here but it did not occur at all. Nobody had a chance to vot on anything. What happened was that

Storke owned the land that is now the university and he wanted water for it. Arden Jensen (Judge) went to Washington D.C. to try to fight that. We got no flood control. That was the quick way to do it (open the flood gates) so there was no way to control flooding. We were told that when the dam went in, it would prevent floods but it made it so much worse because before in 1952 we had a flood and it spread out and then you have silt left and your ground is still there. This time (1969) it came so fast taking cattle and tractors with it and lord knows what else, it left some land with a ten foot drop. I completely lost 250 acres that I had used for pasture, just gone. You have to watcah those things. I think Andy Petersen was a really important person in this valley. I would go into his office to see him and while I was there he would get a dozen phone calls from a dozen different people about a dozen different things. They were asking for information and advice. He was always helpful. He helped me tremendously when I took over the ranch. He farmed almost everywhere in the valley, leasing and owned land.

PL: Another name comes to mind, Hastings Harcourt?

Mrs. G: I don't want to comment on this. The trees you see along Buell Flat were from his tree farm here in the valley. I was very upset when all my farmer neighbors sold out to him, I thought a great deal of all of them but they sold to Harcourt. There was McGuire, A. Jacobsen, Luch

Buchardi, these were all neighbors of mine. These were all farmers who had been here for years. The soil along Buell Flat is very good land.

PL: Can I ask you about Vince Evans?

Mrs. G: Oh yes, Vincent of course was definately a promoter. When he first came here he had been a writer in Beverly Hills, and no one knew what to do with him. He became a great friend of Johnnies. Vincent started cutting alfalfa, green chopping it, and Johnnie would go over and help him because Vincent did not know what he was doing. Later he went into Andersens and that was when he really got his stride. That was more his type of thing. No question but Vincent was a promoter, but he promoted in a good way. It was due to him that we have our Theaterfest. He would hound you until you came up with money for Theaterfest. I had a hard time coming up with the \$5,000. He asked me for for Theaterfest. It took awhile for me to get the money. Vincent came in here at a different period and sometimes he acted like a kid, he got such a kick out of things.

PL: You have always been committed to this place?

Mrs. G: Right. I could not have found anything better, when I first bought this place I used to walk along in the mountains and along the river and say to myself, this doesn't belong to me, its too good to be true. Its funny how things gets together. If I hadn't married John Gardner I would not have owned a ranch. My mother was

quite a horse woman, and she taught me things. But in Minnesota you don't get much chance to be with horses.

PL: What do you perceive for the future of the Valley?

Mrs. G: Its hard to say, I would hope the younger generation would be aware of whats really important and protect it.

PL: What about your son, Slick?

Mrs. G: He has now leased land up near Bakersfield and he has land in Santa Maria. He wants to farm in a big way. You take John Bacon, who is farming the old fashioned way with a mule and plow. That is very interesting. That may be the way the valley should go. I feel that Slick has all this big equipment, but is that good. I read a lot of stuff on farming. It seems that you can ruin land with all this big equipment. Thats what is happening all over California. The land is being stripped by erosion. Sometimes the farmer does not take care of himself. I was talking with one farmer, and he was giving me the old line..."you should be able to do what you want with your own land...", and I said, but what about your neighbors? Agriculture and residences don't mix. They can not be side by side. Both bother each other. You havea to make up your mide between agriculture or homes. We, on the Advisory Committee did one thing that I think was good, we kept the town separate. For instance, Solvang coming toward Buellton, is separated by the industrial area.

PL: Before we close this interview, may I ask about the Historical Society, did you have anything to do with its

beginnings?

Mrs. G: No, I wasn't active, I remember giving some things to the museum, two oxen yokes, but I don't remember where they came from. I knew Ellen Gleason, and like her a lot, she was a wonderful person, and died too soon.

PL: Thank you for this interview today.